



Finland

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2001](#)

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Finland is a constitutional republic with a directly elected head of state (President), a Parliament, a head of government (Prime Minister), and an independent judiciary.

The Government maintains effective control of the police, all security organizations, and the armed forces.

The total population is approximately 5,167,000. The economy is primarily market based, and it provides citizens with a high standard of living. Per capita gross national product in 2000 was \$23,408 (160,914 FIN).

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provide effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. The Government is taking steps to address the problem of violence against women. There were reports of trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, for prostitution.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

During the year there were a number of attacks on Muslims and Muslim-owned businesses perpetrated by skinheads (see Section 5).

Prison conditions generally meet international standards, and the Government permits visits by independent human rights monitors. Male and female prisoners are held separately. Juveniles are held separately from adults, and pretrial detainees are held separately from criminals.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile, and the Government generally observes these prohibitions.

Warrants are required for arrest. If an individual is arrested while committing a crime, a warrant must be obtained within 3 days. Once arrested the accused must be given a court hearing within 3 days. There is no system of bail except for very serious crimes. Preventative detention is only permitted during a declared state of war for narrowly defined offenses, such as treason, mutiny, and arms trafficking.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respects this provision in practice.

The judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Administrative Court, and the lower courts. The President appoints Supreme Court justices, who in turn appoint the lower court judges. Supreme Court justices may serve until their retirement, which usually is at age 63, although justices may serve until age 67.

The law provides for the right to a fair public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforces this right with vigor. Local courts may conduct a closed trial in juvenile, matrimonial, and guardianship cases, or when publicity would offend morality or endanger the security of the state. In national security cases, the judge may withhold from the public any or all information pertaining to charges, verdicts, and sentences. The law provides for sanctions against violators of such restrictions.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such practices, the Government generally respects these prohibitions in practice, and violations are subject to effective legal sanction.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combine to provide freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

There are 226 newspapers, but only 56 are printed daily. A majority of the newspapers are independent and the rest are produced by political parties. There are 5 national radio stations and approximately 60 local commercial stations; all are independent. There are four independent national television network stations: two are public service stations; and two are commercial stations.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the freedoms of assembly and association, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There are two state churches: the Evangelical Lutheran Church; and the Orthodox Church. Nontraditional religious groups freely profess and propagate their beliefs.

All citizens belonging to one of the two state churches pay, as part of their income tax, a church tax. These church taxes are used to defray the costs of operating the state churches. Those who do not want to pay the tax must inform the applicable state church that they are leaving that church. Nontraditional religious groups are eligible for some tax relief, (for example, they may receive tax-free donations), provided they are registered with, and recognized by, the Government as religious communities.

The Ministry of Education has outlined requirements for recognition of religious communities. Religious groups should have at least 20 members. The purpose of the group should be the public practice of religion, and the activities of the group should be guided by a set of rules. The Government recognizes 45 religious communities as churches.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education turned down the application of the Finnish Association of Scientologists to be registered as a religious community on the grounds that the association had failed to supply additional requested information on its fundraising efforts. This was the first time that an applicant had been denied church status. The Education Ministry's decision can be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court; however, the Scientologists have not yet done so.

Instruction in the tenets of the state religions is incorporated into the curriculum of all public schools; however, students who are not members of the state churches may substitute general classes on religion and philosophy.

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respects them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylum status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol. The Government cooperates with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. Approved refugees and asylum seekers are processed directly for residence. A 1999 law promotes the integration of immigrants who have been granted asylum. The issue of the provision of first asylum has never arisen.

There was a significant decrease in the number of asylum-seekers during the year: There were 1,590 applicants for asylum compared to 3,170 in 2000. The largest groups of asylum seekers were Ukrainians and Iraqis. The Government granted asylum to 4 persons and residence permits to 821 others. The authorities refused 1,083 applications. In July 2000, a new law took effect permitting authorities to reject, on an expedited basis asylum applications considered to be groundless--typically applications from "safe" countries, such as European Union countries and Russia. Following an initial asylum examination by the police (which can take several months), applications must be heard within 7 days, and applicants have 8 days to appeal a decision. Under the previous system, processing of applications could take over a year, and if the applicant received a negative decision, the processing of the appeal could take several years.

There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their Government peacefully, and citizens exercise this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

The percentage of women in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population; however, women are well represented at all levels of government. There are 74 women in the 200-member Parliament, and 7 in the 18-member Cabinet. The President, the Speaker of Parliament, and one of the two Deputy Speakers of Parliament are women. The law requires a minimum of 40 percent membership from each sex on all state committees, commissions, and appointed municipal bodies.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups in general operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials are very cooperative and responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, or disability, and the Government effectively enforces these provisions.

Women

Violence against women was a problem, and the Government took steps to combat it. Police statistics for 2000 recorded 2,876 cases of domestic violence, 51 more than during the previous year. Of the victims, 2,280 were women, and 596 were men. A total of 579 cases of rape were reported to the police in 2000, compared with 514 in 1999. Government experts say that as many as half, if not more, of all rape cases may go

unreported. The law specifically criminalizes rape, spousal rape, and domestic abuse. The law provides for stringent penalties for violence against women; the police and the courts vigorously enforce this provision. There were reports of trafficking in women for prostitution (see Section 6.f.).

The number of calls to the police concerned with domestic violence is not compiled centrally, but it is estimated at 10,000 to 12,000 annually. Shelter officials state that the figure represents less than half of the number of actual incidents. The Union of Shelter Homes, as well as the municipalities, maintain homes all over the country for female, male, adult, and child victims of violence; the total number of shelters is approximately 20. Officials have established some shelter homes for minors as well, mainly 15 to 18 year olds. Most of the persons seeking shelter are women between 25 and 35 years of age, either married or in a common-law relationship, and nearly one-third are immigrants.

In 1997 the Government began a special program to promote women's equality during the period from 1997-99 and the program was renewed in 1999 to run through the year. This program consisted of 30 projects, 1 of which focused on violence against women and domestic violence, including the prevention of prostitution and the trafficking of women. The project against violence offered nationwide support for women in need and for men to combat their own tendencies to resort to violence; it has helped to break the taboo about the subject. The government-established Council for Equality coordinates and sponsors legislation to meet the needs of women as workers, mothers, widows, or retirees.

The Constitution calls for the promotion of equality of the sexes in social activities and working life--the latter particularly in the determination of remuneration--and the country has a comprehensive equal rights law; however, in practice comparable worth has not been implemented because of the difficulty of establishing criteria. Women's average earnings are 82 percent of those of men, and women still tend to be segregated into lower paying occupations. While women individually have attained leadership positions in the private and public sectors, there are disproportionately fewer women in top management jobs. Industry and finance, the labor movement, and some government ministries remained male dominated. Approximately 50 percent of physicians are women, although 65 percent of physicians who graduated during the year were women. Women serve in the armed forces. The Government's equality ombudsman monitors compliance with regulations against sexual discrimination. Of the 109 complaints processed by the Ombudsman between January 1 and June 30, 20 cases were judged to be violations of the law. In such cases, the law provides for correction of the situation as well as compensation for the complainant.

Children

The Government is strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funds systems of public education and medical care. Education is free and compulsory for children between 7 and 16 years-of-age. More than 99 percent of children between these ages attend school, and girls and boys are treated equally in the education system.

There is no pattern of societal abuse of children, and the national consensus supporting children's rights is reflected in law. There were reports of trafficking in children for prostitution (see Section 6.f.).

Persons with Disabilities

There is no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. The deaf and the mute are provided interpretation services ranging from 120 to 240 hours annually. The Government provides subsidized public housing to persons with severe disabilities.

Although the law requires that new public buildings be accessible to persons with physical disabilities, many older buildings remained inaccessible. No such law applies to public transportation, but each municipality subsidizes measures to improve accessibility to public vehicles. Local governments maintain a free transport service that provides a minimum of 18 free trips per month for each person with disabilities.

Indigenous People

Sami (Lapps), who constitute less than 0.1 percent of the population, benefit from legal provisions that provide for the protection of minority rights and customs. The Constitution provides for the protection of Sami language and culture and the Government financially supports Sami culture. Sami receive subsidies to enable them to continue their traditional lifestyle, which revolves around reindeer herding. Sami have political and civil rights, and they are able to participate in decisions affecting their economic and cultural interests. The use of the Sami language, a minority language that is used regionally, is permitted in schools, the media, dealings with administrative and judicial authorities, economic and commercial life, and cultural activities.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The number of immigrants rose from 91,074 in 2000 to 96,774 at the end of the year. Immigrants account for 1.86 percent of the population. Approximately 50 racially motivated crimes were reported during the year in the small town of Joensuu, where the unemployment rate among young persons is over 20 percent. Persons identifying themselves as skinheads perpetrated a number of these attacks. There were attacks against immigrant Muslims and businesses owned by Muslims. In September 1,500 persons took part in an antiracism demonstration in Joensuu. Government officials consistently have spoken out against such violence.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides for the rights of trade unions to organize, to assemble peacefully, and to strike, and the Government generally respects these provisions. Approximately 79 percent of the work force is organized. All unions are independent of the Government and political parties.

The law grants public sector employees the right to strike, with some exceptions for employees who provide essential services. During the year, there were a number of strikes. Most strikes were brief and occurred in the industrial sector. From March until mid-August, there was a public physicians' strike. It was the longest strike in a number of years.

Trade unions freely affiliate with international bodies.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law provides for the right to organize and bargain collectively. Collective bargaining agreements usually are based on income policy agreements between employee and employer central organizations and the Government.

The law protects workers against antiunion discrimination. Complaint resolution is governed by collective bargaining agreements as well as labor law, both of which are enforced adequately.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor; however, there were reports of trafficking in persons (see Section 6.f.).

The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, there were reports of trafficking in children (see Section 6.f.).

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits youths under 16 years of age from working more than 6 hours a day or at night. The Labor Ministry enforces child labor regulations; there were virtually no complaints of the exploitation of children in the work force. The Government adheres to the standards of ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The law prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, there were reports of trafficking in children (see Section 6.c. and 6.f.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislated minimum wage, but the law requires all employers—including nonunionized ones—to meet the minimum wages agreed to in collective bargaining agreements in each industrial sector. These minimum wages generally provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

The legal workweek consists of 5 days not exceeding 40 hours. Employees working shifts or during the

weekend are entitled to a 24-hour rest period during the week. The law is enforced effectively as a minimum, and many workers enjoy stronger benefits through effectively enforced collective bargaining agreements.

The Government sets occupational health and safety standards, and the Labor Ministry effectively enforces them. Workers can refuse dangerous work situations without risk of penalty.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not explicitly prohibit trafficking in persons, although trafficking can be prosecuted under other statutes; there were reports that trafficking occurred. The country is a destination and transit country for trafficking in persons. According to the Government, most trafficking involves women and girls for prostitution from Russia and Estonia.

During the year, the Government and local NGO's made efforts to prevent trafficking. The Government has a leading role in promoting the EU's antitrafficking "STOP" project, which is an effort to create a multinational network to monitor, analyze, and combat trafficking in persons.

While the law does not specifically prohibit trafficking in persons, traffickers can be prosecuted under other laws that prohibit slavery, the exploitation of prostitution by means of coercion or fraud, pimping and other related activities, and arranging illegal entries. There have been few cases in which the authorities prosecuted traffickers; however, according to the Government, the trafficker is often abroad and therefore difficult to prosecute.

The law includes provisions for witness protection, although no specific program initiates and regulates such policies. Legal council is provided to victims as well as medical care and psychological counseling. The Government participates in the funding of shelters, which are generally municipally run.